

## **CPC Minutes of October 18, 2011**

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, October 18, 2011 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Meeting Room, 444 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:47 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Stephen Durkee, Vice Chairman Harrison Bilodeau, Ina Anderson, Meredyth Church and JoAnn Ryan

Member Absent: Luis Torrado

Staff Present: Robert Azar, Melanie Army and Choyon Manjrekar

Approval of meeting minutes from July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011: Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

Mr. Azar announced that Ms. Nickerson was unable to present the Comprehensive Plan update and requested that the item be continued to the following month.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to continue the item to the following month. All voted in favor.

### **Director's Report – Update on the Downtown Knowledge District Study**

Mr. Azar delivered the Director's report, an update on the status of the Downtown and Knowledge District (KD) study with information on rezoning the I-195 east side parcels. Mr. Durkee said the Commission would be involved with the project and information would be important when it considered the zoning changes.

Mr. Azar said the I-195 Commission would follow the City's Zoning Ordinance, Comprehensive Plan and review process, provided the changes were complete before July 1, 2012.

Mr. Azar spoke said the framework he had presented the previous month would be used to zone the Knowledge District (KD). He said zoning of the I-195 parcels was a separate process that would occur simultaneously. The development and build out plan for the KD and I-195 parcels is expected by November. Zoning language submitted to the Council is expected by January. Mr. Durkee asked if there would be a public hearing before the Commission. Mr. Azar said zoning changes do not require a public hearing as they are a recommendation to the City Council's Ordinances Committee.

Mr. Azar said six concepts were developed to aid the zoning of the KD. The concepts of a waterfront area, a green link connection to the hospital campus, an interactive place to recognize the core of Downtown and the Jewelry District and a hospital area for tall, dense development with neighborhood friendly edges. Ms. Anderson asked for a clarification of expansion zones in the hospital area. Mr. Azar said those were areas where hospital operations could expand versus areas where mixed use would occur. Ms. Church asked for an explanation of public gathering places. Mr. Azar said those were areas where there were opportunities for open space close to the hospitals. He spoke about the gateway area which could accommodate more intense development to highlight the City. He said the proposed zoning would match the concepts presented and be used to update the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Azar said colleges weren't allowed in the Jewelry District and Brown's Medical School expanded in the area due to a special use permit and change in their Institutional Master Plan. Hospitals are allowed by right in Downtown. He said questions regarding allowing certain types of institutions versus others needed to be answered. Mr. Azar said that uses like laboratories and research facilities are not allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. They tend

to be large buildings with big footprints that may not be appealing to the pedestrian environment and not be conducive to street level retail. Urban design was an issue that needed to be discussed.

Mr. Durkee said the area around the hospital may be suitable for buildings with large footprints. Mr. Azar said the Hospital wanted to move research into the Jewelry District (JD) and administrative functions into Washington Park. Mr. Azar said research and development would most probably occur in the JD. Mr. Azar said surface parking was undesirable Downtown and questions about parking structures and parking requirements for developers needed to be answered. He said the parking requirement for Downtown is half of what is normally required to promote a dense Downtown and encourage reuse of buildings without having high parking requirements. Mr. Azar said there are strict regulations for design in the Capital Center and Downtown. A system similar to Downtown Design review with A and B Streets may be applied.

Mr. Azar said the KD study was moving toward having one Design review board which would review projects Downtown. He said the study would determine what projects would be reviewed by staff and what would be reviewed by local boards to ensure a predictable process.

Mr. Cortes asked why project review was being designated to a Downtown review board instead of the CPC. Mr. Durkee said he believed the board was better equipped to deal with design review. A discussion on design review ensued. Mr. Cortes asked how expansion around the hospital district would occur if research and development facilities were being moved to the JD. Mr. Azar said it was hoped that the KD would attract developers who wanted to be close to research and development activity. Mr. Bilodeau said moving hospital functions to different parts of the city would be helpful in creating linkages between those areas. A discussion ensued on the role of the hospital. Ms. Anderson asked about the relation of the Providence Community Health Center (PCHC) to the KD. Mr. Azar said PCHC would help connect both areas.

Mr. Durkee said it was important to understand the complexity of the hospital area. He said that buildout of the KD may take a number of years and temporary uses needed to be studied. Mr. Azar said temporary uses would be important. A discussion ensued about other uses in the KD.

Mr. Durkee asked if the pedestrian bridge on the eastside needed to be zoned as the chosen design had a retail use on it. Mr. Azar said the process would have to be determined. Mr. Durkee said siting of large plate buildings in the KD may be difficult. Mr. Azar said since buildings would be tall, an appropriate setback would have to be used. Mr. Peter McClure said he thought it would be difficult for large floor plate buildings to stitch the Downtown and Jewelry District together. Mr. Bilodeau said building design would be important. A discussion on design ensued. Mr. Durkee said connections between Downtown and the KD would be important. Mr. McClure asked about the housing element as it would be important to enliven the neighborhood. Mr. Azar said housing was important and a range of housing options would be allowed, but the regulations would not specify where housing should be located. Mr. Durkee said the streetcar line would be successful with housing along its route. Mr. Azar said it would be difficult to direct housing development to specific areas. Ms. Ryan asked if the streetcar line had been finalized. Mr. Azar said the alternatives and environmental analysis to define the streetcar route were complete. Mr. McClure said a City Walk would be important for the development of the KD. Mr. Azar said the term used was “green link” and pedestrian connection amongst parcels would be mandated.

### **1. Public Hearing of Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding requests**

Public hearing on city funding requests for the 2013-2016 TIP prior to submission to Statewide Planning by DPD Staff – for discussion

Ms. Army said the State updates its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) every four years. The TIP is a list of transportation projects that the state funds. In the past, projects listed under the current TIP were automatically moved forward and new projects could be proposed. Due to fiscal constraints, the State Department of Transportation will receive \$160 million from the Federal Highway Administration instead of \$210 million it is normally allotted. Fifty million of that sum will go to the debt service for the I-way and Sakonnet River Bridge. Approximately \$110 million is expected to be divided amongst communities for transportation projects. Ms. Army

said that communities were instructed by the DOT to reprioritize the projects on the current TIP and whether they wanted to add new projects. She said the list of projects before the Commission took budget constraints into account.

Ms. Army said funds for the Roger Williams Park Bike Path, India Point Park Visitors Center and \$500,000 of \$1 million allocated for tide gates and sedimentation on the Providence River were being allocated to cover the funding gap for the Pedestrian Bridge. The defunded projects had not been designed and an Environmental Impact Statement and intensive study was required before the sedimentation and dredging projects could commence. The Elmwood Avenue 1 R project costs \$6 million and runs from Roger Williams Avenue to Trinity Square and was the first project prioritized. The Smith Street 1 R project that involves repaving from I-95 to Lindhurst Avenue was the second. The City is required to prioritize bridge funding, but the bridge engineers at DOT will make the final decision on funding. She said rehabilitation of the Dean Street Bridge and rehabilitation of the Dean Street Parkway will take priority. The harbor junction bridge carries Elmwood Avenue over P&W railroad tracks and the Henderson Bridge are the other bridge projects receiving priority. The Westminster Street study and development has been part of the TIP for years, but will be included for study and development. The realignment of interstates 195 and 95 to form a clover leaf pattern with Thurbers and Allens Avenue will also be studied. The burying of overhead power lines at India Point Park is also included in the TIP.

Ms. Army said that the prioritization of projects would be reviewed by the Transportation Advisory Committee, which in turn will be presented to the Technical Committee and State Planning Council. The funding is expected to be finalized by June 2012.

Mr. Cortes asked if the Manton Avenue bridge over the Woonasquatucket River would be funded. Ms. Army said funding was being sought outside of the TIP since Manton Avenue was not a State Street. Mr. Grant Dulgarian asked what portion of the Dean Street Bridge area would be funded. Ms. Army said it would apply till the route 10 interchange. A discussion between Mr. Dulgarian and Ms. Army ensued.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'C. Manjrekar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Choyon Manjrekar,  
Recording Secretary